

*Box #1*

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY.

By John Cochrane.

Mag. of Am. Hist.  
Sept. 1884.







## MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

A century has elapsed since the American Revolution, and in the interim much has been written and published concerning it. But there is still something to be supplied. Comparatively little has ever been accessible to the public concerning the medical department of the army of



*John Lechman*

*Director General of Military Hospitals.*

patriots. The historian seems only to have considered this feature of the war in a general way, while dealing with other subjects in detail. Reasons for this possibly exist; the records may have been destroyed by the British in 1814. Whatever the cause, certain it is that there is a lamentable absence of information about an arm of the public service of no secondary

importance. Fortunately, the letter-book of its official head, Dr. John Cochran, has been preserved,\* and in the belief that a few extracts from its centennial pages will be of interest to the reader, and serve to throw fresh light upon obscure passages in our history, this paper has been prepared.

In the year 1570 John Cochran, of kin to the Earl of Dundonald, emigrated from Paisley, in Scotland, to the north of Ireland. James, his descendant in the sixth generation, crossed the sea to America, and in the early part of the eighteenth century settled in Pennsylvania. His third son, born at Sadsbury, Pennsylvania, September 1, 1730, was Doctor John Cochran of the Revolution, who was educated for a surgeon by Dr. Thompson, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Having received his diploma, he on the outbreak of the French and Indian war entered the English service as surgeon's mate in the Hospital Department, and remained with the Northern Army to the close of hostilities. When General Bradstreet marched against Fort Frontenac in the summer of 1758, he joined him, together with Major (afterward General) Philip Schuyler. In the campaigns of this war he acquired the medical proficiency and the surgical expertness for which he was afterward celebrated. On the 4th of December, 1760, he was united in marriage at Albany, New York, to Gertrude Schuyler, the widow of Peter Schuyler, and the only sister of General Philip Schuyler. He afterward removed to Brunswick, New Jersey, where he practiced his profession, and was one of the founders of the New Jersey Medical Society in 1766, succeeding Dr. Burnet as its President in 1769. His residence at Brunswick terminated when the British burned his house in the first years of the war. At the close of the winter of 1776 he volunteered his services in the Hospital Department of the Army of the Revolution, and Washington, in a letter written in the beginning of 1777, in which he spoke of his experience and services in the French war, recommended his name to the favor of the national legislators. Congress having, April 7, 1777, resumed the consideration of a report on the hospitals, plans modeled after those of the British army were submitted by Dr. Cochran and Dr. William Shippen, which, being duly approved by General Washington, were on that day adopted, and prevailed till re-

\* The letter-book in the possession of Gen. John Cochrane, the grandson of Dr. John Cochran, from which these extracts are made, covers the period from January, 1781, to June in 1782, and furnishes an authentic official statement of the condition of the Medical Department of the Army of the Revolution during that time and to the end of the war. The letter to Jonathan Potts, given under date of March 18, 1780, was written while Dr. Cochran was Surgeon-General of the army, and is undoubtedly a not overdrawn account of the condition of the department during the Revolutionary war.



modeled by Congress September 30, 1780. On the 11th of April, 1777, in pursuance of His Excellency's recommendation, Dr. Cochran received the appointment of Chief Physician and Surgeon-General of the Army. After nearly four years of service in this position, he was, on the resignation of Dr. Shippen, promoted by the appointment of Congress (17th of January, 1781) to that of Director of the Military Hospitals of the United States, in which capacity he continued to the end of the war. The documents handed down to us—his entries, memorandums and letters—partake of the authority of an official record. They also disclose the many and distressing difficulties of the situation. During this exciting period the country passed through the severest of trials. There have been other wars of greater magnitude and of longer duration, but none, I think, so heroic as this. The war of 1861 was to preserve the government—the government established by the Army of the Revolution in the birth-throes of pain and tribulation. The Army of the Union was organized with formidable numbers, an abundant commissariat, speedy transportation, adequate supplies, a thoroughly appointed medical department, and every equipment requisite to the conduct of modern war. In these essentials, certainly it was superior to its enemy; and though justly deserving the meed of praise, its proudest laurels are by no means concurrent with the heroism of the Army of the Revolution, as the effort of a people in their incipience to establish a government is more heroic than the effort of a people at their maturity to prevent its overthrow.

The Medical Department, as re-arranged October 6, 1780, consisted of a Director of the Military Hospitals of the Army, stationed at headquarters, a Chief Physician and Surgeon of the Army, stationed with the army, three chief physicians and surgeons of the hospitals, stationed variously at the principal hospitals, a purveyor and assistant, with their clerks, an apothecary and five assistants, fifteen hospital physicians and surgeons and twenty-six mates, detailed to different hospitals as required, nine stewards, three storekeepers, one clerk of the magazine, seven ward masters, seven matrons, thirty nurses and orderlies detailed from the ranks, or otherwise employed, as occasion demanded. As already stated, Dr. Cochran was appointed Surgeon-General of the Army April 11, 1777, and commissioned October 6, 1780, Chief Physician and Surgeon of the Army, with Dr. William Shippen his superior as Director of the Military Hospitals. He continued in that capacity until the resignation of Dr. Shippen, when, January 19, 1781, he was advanced to the head of the medical department. Dr. James Craik, previously the first in order of the three chief physicians and surgeons of the hospitals, was given the place of Chief Physician and



Surgeon of the Army, vacated by Dr. Cochran, and Dr. William Burnet, one of the fifteen hospital physicians and surgeons, was promoted to his place. The remaining two chief physicians and surgeons of the hospitals were Drs. Malichi Treat and Charles McKnight. Dr. Thomas Bond was the purveyor and Andrew Cragie the apothecary. Military necessity decided the location of the hospitals. The most prominent were at the artillery huts near New Windsor, the Robinson House, West Point barracks, Morristown, Albany, Philadelphia, New Hampshire huts, New Boston, Fishkill, Yellow Springs, Williamsburgh and Trenton. An additional flying hospital accompanied the army, and small-pox hospitals were established as needed. The hospitals at the artillery huts, the barracks at West Point and the Robinson House, appear to have been designated by Congress. Returns from all of these, so frequent as to enable a statement to be tabulated and transmitted every month either to the chairman of the Medical Committee of Congress, the Board of War, or the Secretary of War, represented with periodical accuracy the physical condition of the army. The columns, which show for each month the treatment in hospital of an average of fifty of the wives and children of soldiers, happily disclose to the observation of the curious an exceptional benevolence in the usage of war.

The scale of compensation was at the extreme of moderation. In no degree, however, in the absence of value to the currency in which it was rated, could pay have been invested with the attraction of reward. Yet, it is submitted as not devoid of interest. To the office of director of the military hospitals was attached the pay of \$150 per month, 2 rations, 1 for servant and 2 of forage; to that of the chief physician and surgeon of the army, \$140 per month, two horses and wagon, and 2 rations of forage; to each of the three chief physicians and surgeons of the hospitals, \$140 per month and 2 rations; to the purveyor, \$130, and his assistant, \$75 per month; to the apothecary, \$130 per month, and his two assistants, \$50 per month each; to the fifteen hospital physicians and surgeons, \$120 per month each, and to each of the 26 mates, \$50 per month. The stewards received each \$35 per month, the clerks and storekeepers \$2 per day, the seven matrons a half dollar each, and a ration per day, the thirty nurses each two shillings and a ration a day, and the orderlies, if soldiers, one shilling and a ration, and if citizens, two shillings and a ration a day.

The department at the South was organized by resolution of Congress of the 15th of May, 1781, with David Oliphant, of South Carolina, deputy director; Peter Fayssonx, chief physician of the hospitals—pay, \$140 per



month, 2 rations, and 2 of forage; James Browne, chief physician of the army—pay, \$140, 2 rations, and 2 of forage; Robert Johnson and Wm. Reed, hospital physicians, with pay of \$120 each per month, 1 ration, and 1 of forage; and Nathan Brownson, deputy-purveyor, all of whom were stationed in South Carolina. Subsequently, on the 20th of September, 1780, were appointed by resolution of Congress, Drs. Thomas, Tudor, Tucker and Vickers, physicians and surgeons, for the Southern Department, David Smith, deputy-purveyor, and John Carne, assistant deputy-apothecary.

Such was the medical department, to the administration of which Dr. Cochran was chosen because of his comprehensive experience and intimate knowledge of its details. The language of his letter from New Windsor, March 25, 1781, to Dr. Peter Turner, hospital physician and surgeon, "My appointment was unsolicited, and a rank to which I never aspired, being perfectly happy where I was," attests the modesty of his nature in the acceptance of an unsought and unexpected distinction. The fortunes of the country were then at their darkest—a helpless Congress, an empty treasury, and an exhausted people. Yet, he unhesitatingly undertook the responsibilities of the station, and cheerfully devoted his energies to the service of his country. Writing from New Windsor, March 26, 1781, to Dr. George Campbell, he said: "Whether my present station will contribute to my future happiness time only must discover. But if I have no better success than my predecessors, my lot must be unfortunate indeed. A determined resolution to conform to the rules of right, and that support which I have some reason to expect from every gentleman of the department will, I hope, protect me against the malevolence of my enemies, if I have any. I say, if I have any, for sure I am that I never put a thorn in any honest man's breast."

The temerity often generated by self-sufficiency was alien to his nature. When assuming his official responsibilities, he in appropriate words refers his conduct to the support he may deserve and receive from his official subalterns. "I thank you," he wrote to Dr. Binney, March 25, 1781, "for your very polite congratulations on my appointment, and the favorable sentiments you are pleased to entertain of my disposition, and the willingness you express of serving under my superintendence. In return, I only wish to act such a part as will entitle me to a continuation of your approbation, and that of every gentleman in the department." In a letter to Dr. Thomas Waring Morris, dated February 28, 1781, he said: "The gentlemen of the corps which I have the honor to superintend may be assured that every endeavour of mine shall be exerted to render them as happy as



possible." But his native benevolence was not consumed with the beneficent phrase of amiable intentions. His charities were conversant with the affairs of the humblest, and wherever misfortune interfered with the duties of dependents, or oppressed the deserving, his offices were interposed to alleviate or remove. Strong, however, as were these humane dispositions, they were duly subjected to the superior obligations of official responsibility, and their exercise duly restricted within the sphere of official trust.

From New Windsor, February 28, 1781, he wrote to Dr. George Stevenson, of Morristown: "Dear Sir, I was favoured with yours of the 19th inst. yesterday, and thank you for your congratulations on my appointment to the Directorship of the Hospitals. Whether I shall answer the expectations of the public in general, or of my friends in particular, will greatly depend on the gentlemen of the department, by a faithful discharge of their duty, and a strict observance of the rules laid down by Congress in the plan for conducting the Hospital Department. I believe that you are persuaded that you have my patronage and every good intention to your welfare. Therefore I should be very sorry that your situation should ever be such as to put it out of your power to comply with any orders you may receive from your superior. It is very evident that you cannot live on the air, and unless money is furnished, you cannot proceed to Virginia, where I do not believe that you will be ordered. But should you be so unfortunate, as it so badly accords with your circumstances, on application to Dr. Treat, I am persuaded he will order another in your place, you first making known to him your particular situation."

But in a letter to Dr. James Craik, the life-long friend and personal physician of Washington, Dr. Cochran expressed in the candor of mutual friendship sentiments which, under the circumstances, reflect honor on them both. "New Windsor, March 26, 1781. Dear Craik: The enclosed act of Congress appointing you Chief Physician and Surgeon of the Army in my room, came to hand a few days since, under cover from the President of Congress. Give me leave to offer my congratulations on this appointment, as I know it is more agreeable to yourself than your former station, and more acceptable to the Commander-in-Chief and the whole army. You will not think me guilty of adulation, when I assure you that I would rather have complimented you on the occasion of your being appointed Director, than where you are, for many reasons; and I believe that every member of Congress will do me the justice to acknowledge that I gave you the preference upon every interview I had with them when conversing upon the subject. I know of none dissatisfied with my appointment. \* \* \* I hope to act such a part as to be out of the power of



friend or foe. \* \* \* I shall be happy to see you once more with us. I purpose to be the greater part of my time in the field. Perhaps, you will say, no thanks to you, for that a resolve passed a few days after you left Philadelphia ordering the Director to repair to Head Quarters, and to make that the chief place of his residence." The presence of the medical staff in the field indeed was demanded. In all the war, the doctor had been with the army, alleviating its sufferings, in the rigors of Valley Forge, and stimulating its convalescence in the camp at Morristown. The termination of the war found him at his post near the headquarters of the army.

The following letter, written while he was surgeon-general, to Jonathan Potts, then purveyor to the hospitals, represents concisely the condition of the hospitals, and the routine of their neglect during the period of the war, anterior to his accession to their care and direction.

" Morristown March 18, 1780.

Dear Sir:

I received your favour by Dr. Bond, and am extremely sorry for the present situation of the Hospital finances. Our stores have all been expended for two weeks past, and not less than six hundred regimental sick and lame, most of whom require some assistance, which being withheld, are languishing and must suffer. I flatter myself you have no blame in this matter; but curse on him or them by whom this evil is produced. The vengeance of an offended Deity must overtake the miscreants sooner or later. It grieves my soul to see the poor worthy brave fellows pine away for want of a few comforts, which they have dearly earned. I shall wait on his Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, and represent our situation, but I am persuaded it can have little effect, for what can he do? He may refer the matter to Congress, they to the Medical Committee, who will probably pow-wow over it awhile, and no more be heard of it. The few stores sent on by Dr. Bond in your absence have not yet arrived. I suppose owing to the badness of the roads. If they come, they will give us some relief for a few weeks

Compliments to all friends and believe me

Dear Sir yours very Sincerely

John Cochran "

At no time did the army abound in medical stores. In the year 1781, however, they were nearly extinct. Untended wounds or languishing disease filled hospitals destitute of medicines, and swelled the daily returns



of death. Scarcely was convalescence a boon, when the lack of subsistence faced the soldier in the hospital, and compelled him to beg in the streets for the necessities of life. A crisis more strenuous and an hour more appalling can hardly be conceived than when want and nakedness vainly craved mercy from frigid skies, and the delirium of fever reproached the physician with the futility of his art. In a letter to Dr. Treat from New Windsor, March 25, 1781, Dr. Cochran said: "The state of our finances is such that it will be impossible to lay in a magazine for the campaign. Therefore we must, in a great measure, depend on purchasing as we go." February 28, 1781, he wrote from headquarters near New Windsor, to Dr. Thomas Waring Morris: "The want of necessary stores for our Hospitals affords a gloomy prospect;" and again on the same day wrote to Abram Clark, Chairman of the Medical Committee in Congress: "We have few deaths yet. The poor fellows suffer for want of necessary supplies, which I hope soon will be afforded them. Otherwise there will be little encouragement for physicians and surgeons." To Samuel Huntington, the President of Congress, he wrote from Philadelphia, May 24, 1781: "The Hospitals are in the utmost distress for want of necessities for the sick. In some of them we have not stores, and in others the supplies are so trifling and insignificant as to be of little or no service. I am sensible of the difficulties and embarrassments of Congress, but am also sensible that unless some speedy and effectual measures are taken to relieve the sick, a number of the valuable soldiers in the American Army will perish through want of necessities, who would soon be serving their country in the field could they be supplied. The surgeon who has the care of the Hospital at Boston writes me that his sick are in great want, and that he is not in a situation to procure any relief. At Albany the only article of stores is about sixty gallons of vinegar, and the sick suffer extremely at times for want of provisions. The other Hospitals are in a similar condition." He repeated to Abram Clark, April 30, 1781, from New Windsor, his previous admonition of the 28th of February of that year: "I have from all quarters the most melancholy complaints of the sufferings of the sick in the hospitals for want of stores and necessities that you can conceive, and unless some speedy remedy is applied, the consequence must be very fatal. Dr. Warren, who has charge of the Boston hospital, represents his situation in a very distressed condition, and prays most earnestly for relief"—a picture gloomy enough, but scarcely as dark as that drawn in the following words to the purveyor, Dr. Thomas Bond, from New Windsor, March 25, 1781: "I was favored with yours of the 20th February, about fifteen days ago, on my way to Albany,



which accounts for my not answering you until now—as I only returned last night. I am sorry to inform you that I found that Hospital entirely destitute of all kinds of stores, except a little vinegar, which was good for nothing—and frequently without bread or beef for many days—so that the doctor, under those circumstances, was obliged to permit such of the patients as could walk into town to beg provisions among the inhabitants. \* \* \* I pity our distressed condition on the score of money, and unless a sufficiency can be procured at the opening of the campaign we are undone.” If to these instances of official decrepitude is added the significant request made to Dr. Thomas Bond, purveyor at Norwich, no evidence will be wanting of the penury of the medical department, in all that appertains to an effective or even tolerable arm of the public service—Camp near Dobb’s Ferry, July 26, 1781: “Could you not, by advertisement, be able to procure a quantity of old linen from the good ladies of your city—I was obliged, after the last skirmish, when fifty men were wounded, to give every sheet I had in the world, but two, to make lint.”

It has been seen that he alluded in his letter to Samuel Huntington, the President of Congress, to the failure of Congress to exert the effort required to relieve the deplorable condition of the medical service. Several valuable physicians and surgeons had resigned since the new arrangement of the department went into effect. He suggested to Congress, in his letter to Samuel Huntington, May 24, 1781, that there were “several vacancies for Hospital Physicians and Surgeons, occasioned by resignation, and that in case we should have an active campaign, the department may suffer for want of a proper number of assistants. The eldest mates are qualified to fill their places, and if they could be appointed by Congress with propriety, it would have a tendency to promote the good of the service.” In a letter to the Board of War, from New Windsor, July 4, 1781, he represents that these vacancies “leave us only eight Hospital physicians and surgeons out of the fifteen established by Congress,” three of whom being employed respectively at Boston, Philadelphia and Yellow Springs, “there will remain only five to do the whole duty of the Hospitals of the army, a number very inadequate to the service. The four eldest mates whom I recommended to Congress are very uneasy, and unless promoted, I have too much reason to believe will leave the service very soon; and this, together with other mates who have resigned since my arrival in camp, will deprive us of a great part of our medical aid.” A disregard of this recommendation seems to have been productive of much inconvenience and disorder. Evidently the political necessities of his position did not dispose the



average congressman to supply a vacancy with the candidate best qualified for the place, to the exclusion of an incompetent candidate of his own. The glimpse thus had of the influences which dominated the public service of the Revolution reflects a very exact resemblance upon those which impress the public service now, and unpleasantly imply the painful truth that even in conjunctures of greatest hazard, private interests are apt to obstruct the public weal. The course urged upon the Board of War in this communication, if continuously pursued, might perhaps have obviated the necessity of reform in the civil service of the Government to-day; for in the same letter occur these words: "I am altogether averse to any regular succession of promotion of physicians and surgeons in the Hospital Department; for the situation of the medical gentlemen in our service is very different from other services. The medical officers in the former have been pushed up as occasion required, many of whom were not the least qualified (to say no worse of them), while those of the latter undergo a strict examination, and in general are every way qualified; and I would further observe, particularly in the British service, there is no regular succession, but such are generally promoted in the Hospital Departments as are more capable and attentive, whether from the Regimental Surgeons or Hospital Mates." The effect of these persistent official derelictions is thus announced to the Board of War, August 29, 1781, from Headquarters, east side of Hudson River: "Dr. Marshall, one of our most valuable mates, has resigned within a few days, which will be followed by several others who have been long in service, and acted some years in a superior capacity under the old arrangement, and accepted of mates' stations with an expectation of promotion. A favorable opportunity offered to retain these gentlemen in service by promoting them to the present vacancies, but it appears as if Congress had forgotten that either Hospitals, sick or wounded, had any existence."

Deficient, however, as was the medical department in the means of administering to the health or comfort of the army, there comes to us, among the causes, a remarkable instance of personal obliquity, in strong contrast with the ardor of self-sacrifice which characterized the patriotism of the time. In a letter to Abram Clark, Chairman of the Medical Committee, Dr. Cochran said: "I have a letter from Dr. Cragie, our chief apothecary, now at Boston, informing me that Dr. Foster, the former Deputy Director to the Eastward, has absolutely refused giving up the medicines, instruments, &c., purchased by him for public use, which deranges us much. There is a quantity of Hospital stores at Windsor and Danbury, in Connecticut, in the same circumstances, which he has refused



also. I have taken a short cut, and by stealing a march on him, may probably obtain part, if not the whole. It appears very extraordinary that a public officer, purchasing stores, &c., on public credit, shall, when out of office, retain large quantities of those articles in his hands, in pretence that his accounts are not settled, when perhaps the public owe him nothing, and the sick are perishing for want of these very stores." The "short cut" appears to have been the device of despatching Dr. Ledyard, the assistant purveyor at Fishkill, upon a stolen march to Danbury for the medicines and stores, the failure of which scheme is subsequently thus recorded in the letter to Mr. Clark, which announces the abstraction: "Since sitting down to write, I received a letter from Dr. Ledyard, our Assistant Purveyor at Fishkill, telling me that he could not possibly proceed to Windsor, in Connecticut, in quest of the stores already mentioned, for want of money, not being able to raise as much as would put a hoop on a cask, or a board on a box, if it was wanting."

But the doctor was not thus to be baffled, as we learn by his letter subsequently to Dr. Ledyard, from New Windsor, March 24, 1781: "I know not what to advise you. I hope you have sent some one with the officer to Danbury, to take charge of the stores. Those at Windsor must take their chance until some method can be fallen on to raise the wind, to carry our scheme into execution. In the mean time, either from public or private credit, you can proceed to the business. I will be accountable for the expense attending the procuring the stores." On the 25th of the same month, a letter to Dr. Thomas Bond, the purveyor, announces: "The stores from Danbury have arrived at Fishkill." Thus the extreme of selfishness was confronted and defeated by a prompt beneficence, worthy of the cause to which it was devoted.

Such was the destitution which paralyzed, and very nearly extirpated, the hospitals during the greater part of the war. Under the recuperating effects of its foreign alliances, the country emerged slowly from its indigence, and the medical department gradually expanded to its full functions in the dispensation of the supplies procured from France. A letter from New Windsor, February 2, 1782, directs Dr. Isaac Ledyard, assistant purveyor, to "order Dr. Johonet, the assistant apothecary, to take such quantity of the medicine lately received from France as will be necessary for supplying the Hospitals;" while an earlier letter of September 1, 1781, from Headquarters, east side of Hudson River, to Dr. Bond, the purveyor, thus joyously announced the vigor imparted by France to the energy of the war, and her generous ministration to the exhausted resources of the country: "Colonel Lawrence, who passed through camp last night, on his



way to Philadelphia, has put us in good spirits from the supply of money and everything else requisite, arrived in Boston from our good and generous ally, in consequence of which I hope we shall soon be in high *Blast*."

But desperate as was the condition of the medical department, that of its officers was not less afflictive. It could not be otherwise, that when the sources of general prosperity vanished, individuals should be oppressed with the utmost penury. We have seen the soldier begging for bread; we shall see the officer in quest of clothing. The ordinary uses of life were circumscribed by the blight of indigence. It extended to all stations, and affected all classes. Calamity impended over families, and want intensified the rigor of war with menaced starvation. The outline of the picture startles, but its lineaments revolt. In the letter previously quoted, to Abram Clark, President of Congress, February 28, 1781, Dr. Cochran said: "I hope some pay is ordered to be advanced to the officers of the department, without which it cannot much longer exist. Many of us have not received a shilling in near two years, nor can we procure public clothing."

From New Windsor he wrote, March 26, 1781, to Dr. Craik: "We are so squeezed for paper, that I can only afford you a half sheet for cover and all." From New Windsor, March 25, 1781, he wrote to Dr. Peter Turner, Hospital physician and surgeon, Norwich, Connecticut: "Several of the Hospital physicians and surgeons have resigned since the new arrangement took place, owing, I believe, principally to their not being able to subsist themselves in the service, for it is upwards of two years since many of us have received a shilling from the continent, and there is as little prospect now of pay as there was two years ago." Again, under date of April 2, 1781, he wrote: "Neither myself nor any of the gentlemen who have served with me have received a shilling from the public in twenty-three months, which has, as you reasonably may suppose, reduced us to some difficulties. \* \* \* Paper is so scarce that I am obliged to take a leaf out of an *Orderly Book*."

To Abram Clark, President of Congress, he wrote from New Windsor, April 30, 1781: "I have sent the originals (Hospital returns), not having paper enough to transcribe them into form. Several of the Hospital physicians and surgeons complain that they have not paper sufficient to make out the necessary Hospital returns; therefore, are obliged to omit them." To Robert Morris, from the camp near Dobb's Ferry, July 26, 1781, he wrote: "For God's sake, help us as soon as you can. Most of our officers have not received one shilling of pay for upwards of two years." To Mr. Nitchie, formerly hospital commissary, Headquarters Peekskill, he wrote

Augst 25, 1781: "I am sorry you have not been able to keep your family from starving, but on credit. Your situation is like many others in our service, for I have not received one shilling as pay in twenty-eight months, and there are few among us who have been in better circumstances." In the following passage from a letter to Dr. Treat, from New Windsor, March 25, 1781, we are admitted to a pathetic scene relieved by a gleam of illusive fortune, as quickly quenched in disappointment: "Dr. Young showed me your letter enclosing a resolve of Congress, respecting the depreciation, &c., which made him happy; and, poor fellow, he wanted comfort as much as any man I ever saw. His situation is truly pitiable, and I hope something will turn up which will give him relief."

It is true that Congress at length issued warrants for the pay of the army. But the warrants were as worthless as the credit of Congress, and utterly incapable of relief. He wrote to Dr. Thos. Bond, camp near Dobb's Ferry: "Am very sorry that there is no probability of our receiving money on the warrants obtained for the use of our department, the want of which you may reasonably suppose has a bad effect, both with respect to the officers and the poor suffering soldiers, who deserve a better fate."

As may be supposed, the destitution of the army, both of officers and men, occupied attention largely with efforts to mitigate it. The evil obviously was incident to the occasion, and inherently the chief obstacle to the successful conduct of the war. As we have seen, the distress fell heavily upon the medical department. Its necessities were, in truth, but the total of those of the army, concentrated in effect upon its health, and expressed in representations of the deplorable want of every appliance essential to the preservation of life. The complaints of the sufferers were importunate and ceaseless. As the head of the department, Dr. Cochran, while the recipient of numberless petitions, rarely caused disappointment to the expectations of the petitioners. In his letter (without date) to Dr. Thomas Bond, after stating that "Dr. Wilson urges his coming to Philadelphia to assist in adjusting some matters relative to the department," he said, "I only wait for the arrival of Dr. Craik to set out, but I wish my presence could be dispensed with, for I am most heartily tired of *shuling* my way so often to that place without one shilling in my pocket;" and in the following paragraph of his communication, while in Philadelphia, May 24, 1781, to "Samuel Huntington, Esq., President of Congress," he alludes to the personal expense and the official inconvenience he incurred, in redressing complaints, by importuning Congress for their relief: "Should Congress wish any further or more particular informa-



tion on the subject, I shall be ready to furnish it, and would be obliged to your Excellency to have the matter taken up as soon as possible, that the distresses of the Hospital may be relieved, and that I may be enabled to return to the army, as neither my finances nor my duty will permit me to remain longer in this city."

But "the pay" of the officers and men was a theme of more serious anxiety. The magnitude and extent of its arrears were grave causes of apprehension. While it buoyed the hopes of the enemy, it occupied unremittingly the deliberations of Congress. Its amount was not in dispute. The default was in the depreciation of the currency in which it was paid. At length Congress determined to draw its warrant, for the depreciation, on the credit of the State where the officer served. It seems, however, that a frivolous and impertinent distinction was made by the Legislature of New York against the officers of the medical line. The ire of the department was aflame, and not in the most courtly phrase discharged in the following terms, used at New Windsor, July 5, 1781, to Dr. Bond, one of the sufferers: "The State of New York has refused the warrant in your favour drawn by Congress, and have refused to comply with the requisition of Congress for making up the depreciation to the officers of the Medical line. They are most certainly an execrable set of —. A new Assembly is called, which may probably think better of the matter, and do justice."

In a letter to Dr. Treat, from Camp near Dobb's Ferry, July 18, 1781, occurs this passage: "I have been uneasy about the Marquis's situation." Doubtless this was the occasion referred to by the Marquis in his letter to him from St. Jean d'Angely, June 10, 1799, in which he says: "My health, dear doctor—that very health you have almost brought back from the other world, has been since as strong and hearty as possible \* \* \* As during my fit of illness the watch I then had was of great service to you for feeling the pulse, I thought such a one might be convenient, which I have intrusted to the Chevalier de la (name illegible), and I beg leave to present you with. I did fancy that adorning it with my heroic friend's picture would make it acceptable."

An incident cursorily stated in his letter to Dr. Craik, of March 26, 1781, from New Windsor, while affording an inkling of the difficulties of land carriage, admits us to a view of the affluent hospitality of the landed gentry of New York a century ago, and yet more agreeably surprises us with an intimation that in all "the time that tried men's souls," the ruggedness of war was smoothed and its asperities refined by the amenities attendant upon the presence of wives and daughters in camp. "I am just returned," he says, "from an eighteen day's tour up the North River to

attend Mrs. Washington. We had an agreeable jaunt, excepting the badness of the roads. But we met with so much hospitality wherever we went, that compensation was made for the difficulty of travelling."

Probably, the "agreeable jaunt" was to the manor of Livingston, and terminated at the hospitable manor-house of its proprietor, Walter Livingston, the husband of Mrs. Cochran's daughter Cornelia, by her first husband. After the destruction of their domicile at Brunswick by the British, Mrs. Cochran spent much of her time, during the presence of her husband at the headquarters of the army, with her daughter; and it may have been that the hospitable entertainment of Mrs. Washington on this occasion was not disconnected with the invitation of the General, over a year before, to Mrs. Cochran and Mrs. Livingston to partake of the dinner which, in his letter to the Doctor, he thus humorously imagines and describes:

"West Point, August 16, 1799. Dear Doctor: I have asked Mrs. Cochran and Mrs. Livingston to dine with me to-morrow; but ought I not to apprise you of their fare? As I hate deception, even when imagination is concerned, I will.

"It is needless to promise that my table is large enough to hold the ladies—of this they had ocular demonstration yesterday. To say how it is usually covered, is rather more essential, and this shall be the purport of my letter.

"Since my arrival at this happy spot, we have had a ham, sometimes a shoulder of bacon, to grace the head of the table. A piece of roast beef adorns the foot, and a small dish of green beans—almost imperceptible—decorates the centre. When the cook has a mind to cut a figure, and this I presume he will attempt to-morrow, we have two beefsteak pies, or dishes of crabs in addition, one on each side of the centre dish, dividing the space, and reducing the distance between dish and dish to about six feet, which, without them, would be nearly twelve apart. Of late he has had the surprising luck to discover that apples will make pies; and it is a question, if amidst the violence of his efforts, we do not get one of apples, instead of having both of beef.

"If the ladies can put up with such entertainment, and submit to partake of it on plates once tin, but now iron, not become so by the labours of hard scouring, I shall be happy to see them.

"Dear Sir, Yours  
George Washington."

Quaintly is revealed the peculiar prejudice of the revolutionary period against the parasites of royalty and its scions. The conflict of our ances-



tors with British oppression extended to the persons of those who represented it. It is not singular, therefore, that the appearance in America of William Henry (subsequently William IV.) one of the sons of George III. and then a midshipman under Admiral Digby, should have provoked a flood of popular derision. It is curious to observe the spirit in which the apparition was discussed by those whose lives had been dedicated to the service of their country. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that the opinions of the camp were reflected by the sense of the people. From camp, near Peekskill, October 10, 1781, Dr. Cochran writes to Dr. Craik:

"Digby is arrived at New York with 3 ships of the line and some frigates. With him came one of the Royal Whelps from Great Britain. The address from the Governor and Council with his answer you will see in the public papers. A young lad who came out of New York some days ago, being examined before General Heath, was asked if he saw the young Prince. He answered yes—he saw many get a look at him and he thought he might as well see him as the rest. He was asked what he was like, and what he thought of him. He said he expected to have seen something more in him than other people, but was disappointed, excepting his being the ugliest person he ever saw, with a very large nose. His eyes resembled those of a wall-eyed horse, and his legs, being all of a thickness, from his knees to his ankles; but that he had a fine gold coat. A pretty representative the fellow will make to cause a rebellion to sink at his approach. I think from the description given of him, he is much better calculated to cause an abortion in the fair sex than to quell a rebellion:"

But when domestic treason incurred the popular displeasure, the indignation of the army was intense. The crime of Arnold not only was the theme of denunciation; his very name was proscribed. "Ledyard," wrote Dr. Cochran, October 1, 1781, to Thomas Bond Purv'r, "has gone to New London, where he has sustained the loss of an uncle and brother killed, and another brother taken by that infamous scoundrel Arnold."

In an application to Samuel Huntington, President of Congress, while in Philadelphia, May 24, 1781, Dr. Cochran thus expressed himself;

"I have also to request that the Hospital Officers should be entitled to receive their letters free from the expense of postage, as well as the officers of the line. The propriety of this will be evident when I mention that returns are to be sent from every part of the continent to me as Director, and the expense of Postage would nearly swallow the whole of my pay."

The result of the application is thus recorded: New Windsor, June 30, 1781, Doctor Townshend, Albany. "All letters to and from me are post-free. This I accomplished when in Philadelphia, though I had not interest

to obtain the like for the department in general, which was my desire. I labored hard for that purpose."

A serious oversight had forbidden to the disabled and deprived inmates of the hospitals the solace of religious instruction during the term of the war. Dr. Cochran, from the camp at Fishkill, October 9, 1781, thus directed the attention of Thomas McKean, President of Congress, to the subject: "Before I conclude permit me, Sir, to suggest that while we are endeavoring to provide for the care of the body, should we not pay some attention to the comfort of the souls of our sick soldiers in the Hospitals, by appointing a Chaplain to perform that duty. The Brigade Chaplains, either find it inconvenient, or have not an inclination to officiate in that capacity. It is customary to have a Chaplain to the Hospitals of other nations, to whom we would not wish to yield in point of Christianity." There is no record that the suggestion was acted upon. But it is certain that chaplains devoted to the welfare of the sick, wounded, and dying, in hospitals or field, have never since been wanting in our wars.

On the 30th of April, 1781, he announced to Abram Clark, chairman of the Medical Committee, from New Windsor: "As soon as my strength will enable me, I propose setting out for Philadelphia. On the 5th inst. I was taken with a pleurisy, which has confined me till yesterday, and has left me very weak." On the 23d of March, 1781, from New Windsor he writes Dr. Craik that "his poor little boy lies ill of a fever." New Windsor, 30th June, 1781, he requested Dr. Townshend of Albany, to give his love to his son, "and give him some of your pious advice. You will oblige me much in enquiring of his tutor how he comes on, and acquaint me in your next. He has been hitherto too much neglected, which causes me more anxiety than perhaps I otherwise might feel." From Albany, 17th March, 1782, he informs Dr. Bond that he came there three weeks before "to settle my boys at school, and to endeavour to dispose of some of my property for their and my subsistence." From Head Quarters east side of Hudson River, Aug. 29, 1781, he communicates to the Board of War: "Our Army, till within a few months, has been remarkably healthy. But Dysentery, Intermittent and remittent fevers, with a few putrid diseases begin to prevail," and again, Sept. 26th of the same year, from the Camp at Peekskill, that "the chief part of the sick in the Army and hospitals, is composed of the new levies and the three months men."

From these letters we catch glimpses of the man—a type of that heroism that consists in the consecration of self to duty, and in its beneficial and conscientious performance. The heroism of the soldier is eclipsed by the heroism of the surgeon; and however public sentiment may adopt the



captain of war as the hero of the day, the emancipator from the thralldom of prejudice and ignorance, the vindicator of humanity in the persons of its oppressed and suffering children, the steadfast disciple of the divinity of manhood, and the martyr to its assertion in adversity and persecution—these shall survive as the heroes of the world, when the fame of the warrior shall have slaked and his laurels have withered in the light of a higher civilization. And so he who treads the endangered plain to alleviate and not to inflict, to retrieve and not to dissipate the crushed energies of life, who sedulously devotes his whole of man to the attainment of honor by a just comprehension of life's obligations, and by their thorough discharge becomes the heir of a glory truer and more consummate in the realms of time than the illusory gleam of the conquering sword. Dr. Cochran was of stately presence, of fair and florid complexion, features which testified his Scots-Irish descent, and an expression indicative of genial and benevolent qualities. His reliance was on the merit of which he was conscious, his credentials the evidence furnished by his deeds. The volunteer surgeon's mate of the French war, and the volunteer physician and surgeon of the war of the Revolution, became the head of the medical department of the army by superior expertness in the functions confided to him, and superior alacrity in their performance. An unusual degree of personal modesty precluded the expectation and quelled the desire of official preferment. Not only was his promotion unsolicited, but it was a surprise to the sincerity with which he had urged the undeniable qualifications of his friend and advocated his claims to the position. The separate trials to which he was exposed were but the enumerated perils that lay in the path of the Revolution. The necessities which paralyzed the officer were lamented only as impediments which prejudiced the service. The malignity which committed his dwelling to the flames, and the disease which afflicted his little son and prostrated himself, he suffered only in the contraction of his usefulness to his country. He pawned his personal credit to restore to the public service the property withheld from its use. The last sheets from his bed were bestowed on the exigencies of the wounded. A glowing humanity intensified his attention to the sick, and with an executive capacity as thorough as rare, he was author, adviser and director of multifarious reforms in the army. He was the support and buttress of the languishing and suffering medical department. He ineffectually appealed to Congress that exemption of the officers from liability to postage should remove from their correspondence an odious duty on their domestic affections. His effort was strenuous to compensate to both officers and men the depreciation of their pay, and having accomplished

the full circuit of their temporal wants, he contributed to their spiritual welfare a tender and fervid appeal to the President of Congress, that the consolations of religion should be extended to the inmates of the hospitals by chaplains appointed for the purpose. With enviable patience, under troubled dispensations, and with faith in the rectitude of the cause of the people, he witnessed the return of health to the army, of prosperity to the country, and the establishment of a free and permanent government in a new world.

Such and like considerations are necessary to the comprehension of the true proportions of the war of the Revolution. Interesting and by no means uninformative research might educe from the social condition and domestic relations of the people an important factor in the problem of rebellion. A country of unrestricted extent was sparsely occupied with a primitive and hardy race. In the far removed centers of population and wealth, social intercourse partook naturally of the habits engrafted by the early and intimate association of the colonies with the mother country. Fortunate opulence asserted against indigence the privileges of class, and forthwith intrenched itself in the pretensions, and assumed the cognizance of an aristocracy. Courtly English customs were reflected in the intercourse which regulated their life, and the interval between the people and the great families, when established, increased with their growth in significance and strength. Confessedly, the germ of American Independence found no root in the houses of the great. It sprang from the rugged bosom of the people. It was indigenous there. Not that it was unfaithfully protected or negligently cultivated by the magnates of the land. It was theirs by adoption; not indeed in the primal vigor and purity of its uncomplying inception, which demanded separation, but in the subsidiary of compromise, which contemplated adjustment. Hence it is true, that the march of Revolution was vigorous and united; but the consummate flower of Independence sprang rather from the humble homes of the tillers of the soil, than from the stately mansions of its opulent aristocracy.

In the light of a century it is difficult to exaggerate the grandeur of the victory. Popular institutions, responsible for the good government of millions engaged in the innumerable pursuits which construct the material prosperity and constitute the social and moral character of a people, an expansion of enterprise boundless except by the limits of the possible, an intensity of purpose concentrated upon the attempt, and devoted to the accomplishment of gigantic undertakings in every industrial department, and a position achieved in science, literature, and the arts, competing with European schools, reflect an extraordinary lustre upon the armies and



their leaders, that raised us to an equality with the governments of the Old World, and made us first among the governments of the New.

But it is not this consummation that Americans should consult when measuring the proportions of the Revolutionary War. The magnitude of the conflict is more truly expressed in the condition of the opposing forces that waged it. A century had not sufficed to render practicable communication between the thirteen colonies, which, though of coincident boundaries, were separated by tracts of dense wilderness and ranges of impassable mountains. Population, grouped principally in isolated spots, near the sea-board, was small, but its area large and sparsely settled. In most part exposed to a rigorous climate, it suffered both the ravage of an inhospitable winter and the onset of a more inhospitable foe. The tillage of the soil made niggard return to the labor of the farmer. Individual subsistence depended on daily labor, and the want of public revenue implied an empty Treasury. Ignorant of arms, save as required by the exposure of frontier life, without military training, and destitute of the equipment, the stores, and the ammunition of war—a people thus unprovided, unprepared, and defenceless, were precipitated into war with a nation of vast and available resources, of incalculable power in the cabinet and field, with veteran armies and navies at command, and distinguished with the renown of enemies vanquished and victories won. Eight years the struggle continued. Its ruthless proportions were not remitted to the alleviation of a noble and generous nurture, nor were the resources of a high civilization counted in reserve among the energies of the Revolutionary army. The flame they followed by day, that warmed them by night, that lighted their darkness and guided all their way, was the flame of liberty, inextinguishable in their bosoms. This was their reserve, and to it must be ascribed the issue of the war—to the unquenchable patriotism of the commonalty of America.

*John Cochrane*





